

# STATE REPRESENTATIVE LINA ORTEGA

## Legislative Report • District 77

Representing El Paso County (part)

85th Legislative Report • Fall 2017



## TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*State Representative • District 77*

Dear Neighbor,

It has been an honor to serve as your State Representative during the 85th Legislative Session. This newsletter provides a brief overview of the session and informs you about upcoming events in House District 77.

I filed several bills, along with several amendments and budget amendments, which will favorably impact and benefit our community. El Paso will receive millions of dollars in funding for local higher education institutions, for our International Bridges, and for our local Texas Appellate Court to effectively assist in the administration of justice. My efforts for our community were rewarded by being selected as the House Border Caucus Freshman of the Year.

Still, it was a troubling session, with a great deal of discord on the House floor because of a myriad of controversial bills. The most troubling was SB4, the “Show Me Your Papers” bill, which is now the law of the State. Many members of our community strongly opposed it and with good reason: it opens the door to discriminate against minorities. The Legislature also dealt with transgender bathroom bills seeking to unreasonably restrict the use of public facilities. Meanwhile, important matters like public education funding, restoration of acute therapy for disabled children, and adequate funding for high-quality pre-k were not adequately addressed and instead were placed on the backburner. On the positive side, the Legislature successfully passed bills to help improve our broken child protective services and to improve access to mental health care. I proudly voted against bills that would adversely affect our community and supported legislation that would promote the interest and values of our mothers and children, our elderly, our military families, and our small businesses.



Since returning home, I have been talking to various groups about the legislative session and informing El Pasoans about the new laws that were passed. I hope that you'll be able to attend future Town Hall meetings, where we can continue to address the challenges in our community. Please contact me at my district office should you have any issues or concerns.

Sincerely,



Lina Ortega



Committees: Economic & Small Business Development • International Trade & Intergovernmental Affairs  
Texas Ports, Innovation & Infrastructure, Select

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## IMPORTANT REFORMS OF THE 85<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATIVE SESSION



*Rep. Ortega with Reps. Gervin-Hawkins, Navarez, Turner and House Speaker Joe Straus.*

### CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES (CPS)

This session, the Legislature worked towards resolving major issues within the Department of Family and Protective Services in order to provide increased protection for children in the system.

**House Bill 4** allows households under 300% of the poverty level that are participating in kinship care to receive a monthly stipend. This bill is an effort to keep children with their relatives and thus improve outcomes for CPS cases. **House Bill 7** will improve the court systems and keep more children with their biological parents. **Senate Bill 11** is a sweeping CPS reform bill that expands community-based foster care and provides other important changes in the operation of the CPS system. This bill, unfortunately, also expands the current Foster Care Redesign program on a shorter timeline with less oversight and regulation. I am concerned that the State is pushing this responsibility on to other public and non-profit providers while still failing to provide adequate funding.

### MENTAL HEALTH

**Senate Bill 1849**, known as the Sandra Bland Act, requires jails to implement systems to provide increased monitoring of individuals in custody who are at risk of suicidal behavior. The Legislature also passed **House Bill 10**, which requires insurance providers to treat physical and mental health benefits equally. Additionally, this bill establishes a mental health ombudsman and creates a mental health parity work group.

Finally, the Legislature prioritized children's mental health and development. **House Bill 1600** adds mental health screening to the annual medical examination of children between the ages of 12 and 18 who are enrolled in Medicaid. **Senate Bill 179** addresses cyber-bullying in order to create a safer school environment and **House Bill 674** limits out-of-school suspensions for lower elementary school students.

#### SANCTUARY CITIES ON TRIAL

Several organizations, including both the City of El Paso and El Paso County, filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Senate Bill 4. On August 30, 2017, a federal court blocked several key provisions of the bill from going into effect while the case moves through the court system. This initial decision was critical to protecting our community, and I will continue to provide updates as the case moves forward.



*Rep. Ortega argues a point of order in an effort to defeat the "sanctuary cities" bill SB 4.*

### FIGHTING AGAINST DISCRIMINATORY LEGISLATION

You may have heard about certain bills that passed into law which will sanction discrimination against our families and neighbors. The Governor signed **Senate Bill 4**, a bill that bans so-called "sanctuary cities," requiring local law enforcement and campus safety officers to play a role in immigration enforcement. As passed, this bill will allow local officers to question anyone they detain about their residency status. I believe this bill opens the door for racial profiling and creates a chilling effect that will deter many people from engaging in our community or seeking help and protection when they need it.

The Governor also signed **Senate Bill 5**, restricting access to voting rights by requiring photo identification at the polls. The right to vote is our most fundamental constitutional right, the right that forms the basis of our democratic government. Restricting this right not only weakens our ability to choose our representation but unnecessarily requiring photo identification further disproportionately affects voters who are minorities.

In spite of all the good work done this session to address the dire needs of our kids in foster care, the Legislature also passed **House Bill 3859**, which will allow foster care providers to refuse services on the basis of "deeply held religious beliefs." This concerns me because it can be used as a justification to prevent LGBT families from adopting a child or providing necessary medical services to children in foster care. We need more families opening their hearts and more services for these vulnerable children, not less. We all know the importance of our right to practice our religions freely, but at the same time we need to uphold equal rights and respect for others. This law sends the message that discrimination is justified.

I fought against each of these bills, and I will continue to fight against any legislation that condones discrimination against any member of my community.



# LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

*I successfully passed several bills and amendments during the regular and special sessions.*

## REVITALIZATION OF DOWNTOWN EL PASO

Expands the scope of crimes under the common nuisance statute, giving authorized entities the ability to address dangerous buildings. The bill also extends the appointment of a receiver to a vacant lot or abandoned building in order to secure such properties. Cities and counties now have additional tools to address public safety concerns when dealing with blighted properties. **House Bill 2359** will improve El Paso's downtown revitalization efforts and increase public safety.

## PROTECTIONS FOR CHILDREN AND ELDERLY

Requires a feasibility study on enhanced background checks for Health and Human Services contractors that work with children and the elderly. It has become increasingly common for the State to contract out services to private and non-profit providers. Therefore, it is important that the State is doing everything in its power to protect our most vulnerable populations within its care.

## ACHIEVING REUNIFICATION IN OUR CPS SYSTEM

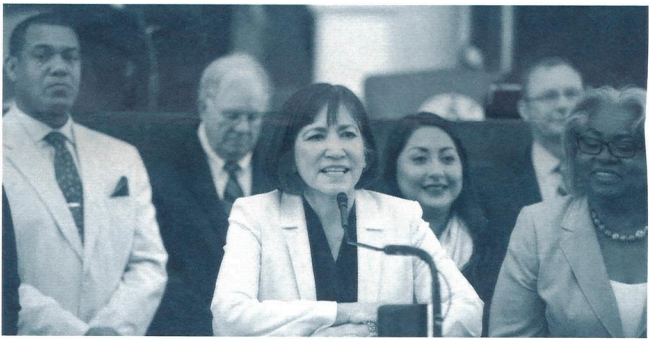
Clarifies the law relating to the timeframe of when foster parents can intervene in a suit between the Department of Family and Protective Services and the child's parents. The previous law contained a loophole, allowing foster parents to intervene before twelve months. Foster parents play an important role in our CPS system, but they were never intended to intervene until after twelve months. **House Bill 1410** ensures that we preserve the goal of reunification of parents and children in our CPS system.

## SUPPORT FOR OUR COUNTY BAILIFFS

Gives El Paso County the ability to increase salaries for bailiffs. Previous law required El Paso County bailiff pay to be uniform effectively preventing bailiffs from receiving the appropriate compensation. I was proud to work on **Senate Bill 1246** with Senator Rodriguez to allow bailiffs to receive compensation based on their experience and qualifications.

## STRENGTHENED THE MATERNAL MORTALITY AND MORBIDITY TASK FORCE

Adds both a labor and delivery nurse and a critical care doctor to The Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Task Force. Labor and delivery nurses have greater firsthand knowledge of the potential complications women experience during childbirth, and a critical care doctor understands what is necessary to stabilize patients with life-threatening conditions. The Legislature created the Task Force in 2013 in order to address this growing public health issue. The addition of these specialists will further enhance the knowledge and experience the task force calls upon to help us understand the best ways to address the maternal mortality crisis in our state.



*Rep. Ortega presents her first bill, HB 1410, on the House floor.*



*Rep. Ortega talks strategy with Rep. Moody.*

## SPECIAL SESSION 85 (1)

The Governor called the Legislature into a special session that lasted from July 18-August 15. The Legislature had failed to pass an important sunset bill to extend several state agencies including the Texas Medical Board during the regular session, and it was necessary to pass this bill. However, the Governor ordered the legislature to consider twenty additional items, which for the most part were not in the best interest of Texans. I was proud to support the extension of The Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Taskforce and increased funding for retired teacher health care. Unfortunately, the Legislature passed several policies that I did not support including:

- Increasing penalties for those committing fraud using mail-in ballots
- Limiting the ability of cities and counties to annex property
- Unprecedented state funding for charter school facilities
- Restrictions on women's healthcare

Many of the Governor's special session call items failed to pass, most notably the transgender bathroom bill that attempted to unreasonably restrict the use of public facilities as well as legislation capping local property taxes. I hope that moving forward the Legislature will stop focusing on these divisive issues and provide meaningful tax relief by providing more funding for our public schools.



## WINS FOR EL PASO IN STATE BUDGET

### 2018-2019 BUDGET (SENATE BILL 1)

The only bill the Legislature is required by the Constitution to pass during the legislative session is the State budget. Our work on this bill reflects the priorities of our State. There were important differences between the House and Senate budget proposals. I was proud that the House prioritized restoration of Medicaid therapy funding, affordable health care for retired teachers, and additional funding for public schools. The Senate had different priorities, and after several weeks of negotiations, the Budget Conference Committee presented us with a disappointing, but ultimately supportable budget. Faced with a revenue shortfall, the 2018-2019 Budget uses some money from the Rainy Day Fund and the State Highway Fund and still does not cover the basic needs of our growing State. I was disappointed that we chose not to use more Rainy Day Fund money, as the balance is expected to reach \$10.9 Billion by the end of 2019. I followed the budget process closely and ultimately voted to support **Senate Bill 1** because it contains substantial funding for our community.



*El Paso House delegation with community leaders celebrating El Paso Days at the State Capitol.*



*Rep. Ortega visits with the El Paso Community College Student Government Association.*

### EL PASO HIGHLIGHTS:

- The University of Texas at El Paso received \$229.2 million for the biennium, providing support for The School of Pharmacy.
- Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center-El Paso received \$142 million for the biennium and funding to establish the dental school.
- El Paso Community College received \$63.6 million for the biennium.
- Zaragoza Bridge and Bridge of the Americas received \$32 million for an Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) to increase safety and reduce wait-time at border crossings.
- El Paso received \$3.374 million for the biennium for 8th Circuit Court of Appeals.
- Rio Grande Compact / Texas-New Mexico Water Lawsuit: received \$500,000, and allowance for increments of \$1 million.

## ★ District Office Information ★

### CONSTITUENT SERVICES

Whether you need help with a state agency or want to be informed about the legislative work affecting our district, my staff wants to assure that you get the help and responses you need. Visit us at the district office if you need help navigating any issues with state agencies.

### INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Do you know an exceptional individual who is interested in making a difference in our community? We are looking for creative thinkers, fast learners, and kind Texans committed to constituent service. Duties will include drafting constituent correspondence, meeting with constituents and advocacy groups, helping staff answer phones, logging data, and conducting interim research projects for upcoming policy.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

Representative Ortega wants to bring a voice to the issues important to you. Please be on the lookout for regular public meetings with state officials, coffee with Lina, and other open forums where you are invited to share your concerns, ideas and questions about your state government.

### Stay Informed

*For more information about ongoing events in the district, join our email list! Please contact us with subject line "JOIN" at [District77.Ortega@house.texas.gov](mailto:District77.Ortega@house.texas.gov) and follow Rep. Ortega on Facebook!*

**DISTRICT OFFICE HOURS:** 8:30am-5pm, Monday -Friday  
(915) 351-4031

*\*Please note: our office will be closed in observance of State holidays*



# DIPUTADO ESTATAL LINA ORTEGA

## Reporte Legislativo • Distrito 77

Representando parte del Condado de El Paso

85th Reporte Legislativo • Otoño 2017



## TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

### State Representative • District 77

Estimado vecino,

Ha sido un honor servir como su Representante Estatal durante la 85 Sesión Legislativa. Este boletín sirve para proporcionar un breve resumen de la sesión, así como para informarle sobre los próximos eventos en el Distrito 77.

Propuse varios proyectos de ley, junto con varias enmiendas y enmiendas al presupuesto, que impactarán favorablemente y beneficiarán a nuestra comunidad. El Paso recibirá millones de dólares en fondos para instituciones locales de educación superior, para nuestros Puentes Internacionales y para nuestro Tribunal local de Apelaciones de Texas para ayudar efectivamente en la administración de justicia. Mis esfuerzos para nuestra comunidad fueron recompensados; fui elegida por el Caucus Fronterizo como Legisladora Novata de la Frontera del año.

Sin embargo, fue una sesión preocupante, con gran discordia en el piso de la Cámara debido a una miríada de proyectos de ley polémicos que se presentaron. El más preocupante fue SB4, el proyecto “Muéstrame tus papeles” que ahora es la ley del Estado. Muchos miembros de nuestra comunidad se opusieron fuertemente y con razón: abre la puerta para discriminar a las minorías. La Legislatura también se ocupó con legislación de usos de baño para transexuales que buscan restringir injustificadamente el uso de las instalaciones públicas. Mientras tanto, asuntos importantes como el financiamiento de la educación pública, el restablecimiento de la terapia aguda para los niños discapacitados, y la financiación adecuada para pre-k de alta calidad no fueron adecuadamente abordados y pasaron a segundo plano. Por el lado positivo, la Legislatura aprobó con éxito proyectos de ley para ayudar a mejorar nuestros servicios de protección infantil rotos y para mejorar el acceso a la atención de salud mental. Yo voté orgullosamente en contra de proyectos de ley que afectarían negativamente a nuestra comunidad y apoye legislación que promovería el interés y los valores de nuestras madres e hijos, nuestros ancianos, nuestras familias militares y nuestras pequeñas empresas.



Desde que regresé a casa, he estado platicando con varios grupos acerca de la sesión legislativa e informando a páseños acerca de las nuevas leyes que fueron aprobadas. Espero que usted pueda asistir a una próxima audiencia pública, donde podremos seguir abordando estos temas y retos en nuestra comunidad. Por favor, póngase en contacto conmigo en mi oficina del distrito si tiene algún problema o interés.

Atentamente,

Lina Ortega



Committees: Economic & Small Business Development • International Trade & Intergovernmental Affairs  
Texas Ports, Innovation & Infrastructure, Select

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Xochitl Rodriguez, Community Liaison  
xochitl.rodriguez@house.texas.gov



HELPFUL NUMBERS • NÚMEROS ÚTILES

Attorney General's Office		Reporting Child Abuse	800-252-5400
Child Support Payment Inquiry	800-252-8014	TX Dept. of Aging & Disability Services	800-458-9858
Consumer Protection	800-621-0508	TX Dept. of Insurance	800-578-4677
Crime Victim Compensation	800-983-9933	TX Council on Family Violence	800-799-7233
Governor's Assistance Hotline	800-843-5789	TX Workforce Commission (Unemployment)	800-558-8321
TX Veterans Commission	800-252-8387		